

TWO DOGS AND TWO YAKS

Pad+ma rig 'dzin པད་མ་རིག་འཛིན།

ABSTRACT

Pad+ma rig 'dzin (b. 1990) in Yo lag (Zhiyue) Village, Mdo ba (Duowa) Township, Reb gong (Tongren) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China provides two accounts of dogs and two accounts of yaks. These accounts are from local community members - Lcags thar skyid (b. 1970), (Chos go, b. 1963), and Sgrol le (b. 1950).

KEYWORDS

Amdo, beloved Tibetan animals, dogs, Mtsho sngon, Qinghai, yaks

INTRODUCTION

I was born (1990) in Yo lag (Zhiyue) Village, Mdo ba (Duowa) Township, Reb gong (Tongren) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. I give two accounts of dogs, and two accounts of yaks. The dog accounts are from my memory. The first yak account was told to me by Lcags thar skyid (b. 1970), who is my father's (Chos go, b. 1963) younger sister. She told me about this yak in late 2016 in her home in her winter pasture in Yo lag Village. She likes to talk with animals. In 2017, she had a ten-year-old female cat, and an old dog. In 2016, she raised a small lamb that followed her everywhere. It was interesting to observe the old dog, cat, and lamb, following her when she drove livestock. She said, "My old dog understands if I tell him to stand or lie down."

She has a good memory and is a gifted storyteller. When I was a child, I often listened to her stories.

The last account is also about a yak. It is from my mother's (Kun thar kyid, 1956-1997) second oldest sister, Sgrol le (b. 1950), in early 2017, in Mdo ba Township Town in her home. She had bad memories of schooling. In about 1956, she was sent to the primary school where she suffered from starvation. She recalled:

I was short and weak. We stood in lines for food at school. Students who were taller, and stronger, than me raised their *gangzi* 'metal cup' over my head to get food. There was not enough food for all the students, and I often did not get any food at all. One day, I cried and asked one of my community members, who was on a *skyel 'dren*¹ to take me back home. He agreed, and thus I was finally able to escape from school, and return home. Later, Mother told me that the hair on my back was covered with lice, and I could not speak. After having enough to eat for several days, I became more active and began to smile. I had nearly starved to death at school.

¹ A Tibetan term for transporting food. In the past during harvest season, our local community members went to farming areas with male pack-yaks to procure flour and *rtsam pa* for the next year.

She remembered the Tibetan alphabet that she had learned in primary school, and taught it to her youngest son, and a grandson, before they went to school.

OUR WATCHDOG

We also owned a vicious dog that Mother was very fond of. In our summer pasture, our neighbor had a daughter who attracted night visitors to her small tent. When this happened, our watch dog jerked on his chain with all his strength. One night, he broke his chain, and ran after a night visitor. Sadly, the visitor used his *mgo skor* 'dog beater' to kill our dog. It was a moonlit night. I didn't notice, but Mother got up and chased after the night visitor.

When she returned home, she said that someone had killed our dog, made several butter lamps, lit them on our altar, and chanted. Later, Mother and neighbor women said it was a pity that we had lost that dog, because, he was a good dog. Mother said, "I feel as bad as though I had lost several yaks. What a bad guy that killed my good dog."

At that time, I didn't understand why Mother said that the dog was more important than several yaks.

KHYI RGAN ZE LE: AN OLD DOG

When I was a child, we had a very old dog, with soft matted brown hair, named Khyi rgan ze le 'Messy-hair Dog'. One of my uncles often kidded "Hey, little brother, what happened to your face? Did Khyi rgan ze le step on your face last night?"

They gave me the nickname "Ngo khyi rje 'Face as Ugly as a Dog's Footprint'. Later when they asked me "What happened to your face?" I answered, "Khyi rgan ze le stepped on my face," without hesitation.

They all burst into laughter when they heard my stupid answer, but I didn't feel self-conscious.

I didn't know how old the dog was, but it was too old to walk

steadily. He was also very dirty and peed on everything he saw. My maternal grandmother, Sgro pa (1923-2010), was very fond of him. They had a long, shared history. We were herders and moved according to the seasons. At that time, we had winter, summer, and autumn pastures. We used yaks and horses to transport our belongings.

During a long move to our summer pasture, Grandmother rode Rta rgan rkyang zhar ¹ and called "Khyi rgan, Khyi rgan..." rhythmically. If we lost Khyi rgan ze le, Grandmother asked Father to find him. Later, Grandmother told us to put Khyi rgan ze le in a basket on the back of a yak when we moved to new pastures.

One day, while Father put him into a basket and was lifting it onto a yak's back, Khyi rgan ze le peed on the front of Father's robe. Father then angrily threw Khyi rgan ze le on the ground.

Grandmother gently responded, "If you hate me, you should beat me. Why beat my dog that way?"

Every time we treated the old dog badly, she was very unhappy and said this in a gentle way. This is what I remember about Grandmother's old dog.

'BRI NAS RDO MA: A FEMALE YAK

We had only two female yaks when my father took us from Sgro rong bo² to Yo lag Village, and we didn't benefit much from them. The yaks delivered some calves that '*go ma bltas pa* 'died without clear reasons'. We exchanged one yak for a big black female yak from one of my relatives, Rdo rje mtsho. We called this yak Nas rdo ma 'like a piece of barley'. She had no horns, and her fat body resembled a big grain of barley.

She was a very good, kind yak. I liked to sit under Nas rdo ma and imitate women who were milking other yaks. Sometimes, she felt bored, and pushed me slightly with her hind leg, which didn't hurt me. Then she would walk away. The women who milked Nas rdo ma said,

¹ We called this very gentle, one-eyed horse "Rkyang zhar" 'red-brown blind'.

² A village located to the southwest of Mdo ba Township Town.

"What a good yak she is! Her udder has so much milk that it fills a big basin." They liked milking her. Her calves were also like her - good udders and they reproduced quickly.

When I was nine years old, Father took my second brother and me on pilgrimage to Lha sa on behalf of my dead mother, who died at a young age. We spent several days walking from Mdo pa to Reb gong. Fortunately, a truck loaded with coal let us ride in the back to Zi ling.

One night in Gor mo, my brother and I accidentally ran in front of some army trucks. Brother ran away quickly, but I couldn't move quickly. A truck nearly hit me. Fortunately, I was not injured. The soldiers in the back of the truck chanted "Mao zhuxi, Mao zhuxi... Chairman Mao, Chairman Mao..." it still sounds in my ears. Maybe they thought I had been mashed under the truck wheels.

There were many soldiers in Lha sa. It was about 1978, so few monasteries were open to pilgrims. Dga ldan Monastery was in ruins. There were no deity images or monks. There was only a small room and an old man who cleaned it. In Lha sa, we found a bell in a ruined monastery building. We returned home with that bell.

One of Nas rdo ma's calves had grown up by the time we got back home. We tied that bell around her neck and called her 'Khrol rdo ma, because we called the bell '*khrol ril*'. When I was about sixteen, I could milk as well as older women. I guess fifteen of my yaks were descended from Nas rdo ma. Later, she was gored to death by another yak. Her meat was delicious. We chanted *ma Ni* as we ate the meat.

During the time the local monastery was rebuilt, Father sold a bull that was one of Nas rdo ma's calves. He sold it for 300 RMB, and then sponsored a big prayer wheel at the monastery to commemorate Nas rdo ma and to accumulate merit. When that bull was small, he was so strong that I could not pull him away while he was nursing. Instead, he pulled me here and there. Tending the calves was a hard job for a weak child.

I still have Nas rdo ma's offspring. Four years ago, I sold half of my yaks. Nag rgyod ma, who was related to Nas rdo ma, reproduced a lot. She became pregnant each year and we have about eight yaks related to her. I am deeply grateful that Nas rdo ma is the most beneficial yak we ever had.

I liked all our livestock. Ten years ago, we sold all our yaks, sheep, and horses and moved to the township town. My black female yak without horns was the most generous, memorable yak we ever had. I chant *ma Ni* every-time I think about her. At that time, my husband's parents gave us a new home with a few yaks, but we didn't have enough yak-milk to raise my daughter. Then, one of my relatives gave us a black female yak that gave a lot of milk. After my daughter grew up, she called that yak 'Bri rgan rta rgan 'old female yak resembling a big horse', because she was very big.

My black female yak gave birth about fifteen times. Later, when she was in her twenties, she fell from the top of a cliff one day. Usually, in spring, animals are too thin to provide much meat, but my black female yak was very fat, and provided us with good meat. That yak truly benefited us. Her milk nourished my daughter. She helped us by giving us many yaks. And she even provided us good meat after her death. It was very hard to acquire good meat in the spring when she died. This is why I sincerely chant *ma Ni* whenever I think of her.

My husband likes horses, but just as I had built a relationship with his horses, he sold them. Later, I did not become attached to his horses. Nowadays, he still spends a lot on horses for races. I remember a big black horse that was very good to us. We used him to carry things when we moved in winter and to the summer pasture. We also rode him while herding. During horse races, he often won. We loved him and dedicated him to the local deities. He died when he was very old.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'bri nas rdo ma འབྲི་ནས་རྡོ་མ།
 'bri rgan rta rgan འབྲི་རྒན་རྩ་རྒན།
 'go ma bltas pa འགོ་མ་བལྟས་པ།
 chos go ཚོས་གོ།
 dga ldan དག་ལ་དྲན།
 Duowa 多哇
 Gangzi 缸子
 Huangnan 黄南
 khrol rdo ma ཁྲོལ་རྡོ་མ།
 khrol ril ཁྲོལ་རིལ།
 khyi rgan ཁྱི་རྒན།
 khyi rgan ze le ཁྱི་རྒན་ཟེ་ལེ།
 kun thar kyid ཀུན་ཐར་ཀྱིད།
 lcags thar skyid ལཱ་གས་ཐར་སྐྱིད།
 lha sa ལྷ་ས།
 ma Ni མ་ཉི།
 Mao Zhuxi 毛主席
 mdo ba མདོ་བ།
 mgo skor མགོ་སྐོར།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།
 nag rgyod ma ནག་རྒྱུད་མ།
 nas rdo ma ནས་རྡོ་མ།
 ngo khyi rje འོ་ཁྱི་རྒྱེ།
 pad+ma rig 'dzin པདྨ་རིག་འཛིན།
 Qinghai 青海
 rdo rje mtsho རྡོ་རྒྱེ་མཚོ།
 reb gong རེབ་གོང་།
 rta rgan rkyang zhar རྩ་རྒན་རྒྱང་ཞར།
 rtsam pa རུས་པ།
 sgro pa སྒོ་པ།
 sgro rong bo སྒོ་རོང་བོ།
 sgrol le སྒོལ་ལེ།
 skyel 'dren སྐྱེལ་འདྲེན།
 Tongren 同仁
 yo lag ཡོ་ལག

Zhiyue 直跃

zi ling ཟི་ལིང།